

Chapter 454

Violet

I brushed myself clean the moment Kyran put me down, fixing my wet hair and straightening my clothes as fast as I could.

I could already hear the voices from behind the trees as I prepared myself for our big entrance. Kyran watched me with an amused look on his face.

"Ready?"

"Yes, let's go."

I let out a huff and grabbed his hand, pulling him forward. As we emerged from behind the trees, all eyes turned to us. My eyes scanned the group quickly, taking in their unbothered gazes. At least they weren't glaring at us this time. Today seemed to be a good day for everyone.

"There they are!" Mandy called out, waving her hand. She sat with a few of the guys near the front.

"Is that Violet?"

I followed the sound of the voice until my eyes settled on Nate. He was lying down, his head resting comfortably in Dylan's lap. Something that wasn't all that unusual anymore, given the bond they'd recently formed.

Jane was sitting on a log at the center, a slight smirk visible on her lips. Her long dark hair was pulled high into a ponytail, making her look firmer than the few times I had met her before. More like an instructor and less like the woman who had invited me to join her for lunch.

"Nice of you to join us," she said.



"Our pleasure," Kylan replied.

I elbowed him in the ribs. There were times he decided to keep his mouth shut, but also times when he would get unpredictable and just say whatever was on his mind.

"He means we're sorry," I said quickly, trying not to look as flustered as I felt. "We lost track of time, and...we're sorry."

Jane let out a soft breath through her nose. "I get it," she said, eyeing us up and down. "Just go join your team, and don't let it happen again."

That was it?

I blinked for a second, then dragged Kylan by the arm toward where Dylan and Nate were sitting before she could change her mind.

It was funny how different mates could be from each other. If this had been Rochwall, we would have been running laps until our legs gave out. Yes, he was kind and soft. Almost teared up when I gave him his bracelet, but he could also get serious. One team, one responsibility. That's what he always said.

And if it was Jörn...

Yeah, he just would've killed us right there and then.

We settled onto the grass beside Dylan.

"Good morning, sis," he said, glancing at me. "Why did it take you so long?"

"No reason."

"Your face is a bit..." He gestured vaguely to his own, as if that explained



everything.

My eyes widened.

"Just a bit red," he explained.

I touched my cheeks, though it didn't matter much. Nate lifted his head from Dylan's lap and grinned up at me. "Hey," he said, his eyes squinting. "I think your shirt is inside out."

"What?"

I panicked, looking down immediately, my hands flying to my clothes, but then I saw it wasn't. Everything was fine. He was just messing with me.

The panic on my face must have been hilarious because Nate burst out laughing. "Did you see the look on her face?"

He slapped Kylan's back, forcing him to laugh with him while Dylan and I shot each other a confused look.

"He did it to me, too, this morning. I think he's not doing well," Dylan chuckled. "Two months without Kaelis and his brain has turned to mush. He's just running on fumes and bad jokes."

I looked at Nate. He had his head leaned against Kylan's shoulder now, eyes half-closed like a puppy seeking warmth. But Kylan didn't push him off. He didn't even flinch.

He just let him stay there, and it softened something inside my heart. I guess he understood that maybe Nate just needed something to hold onto until Kaelis got here.

Whatever it was, it made me smile. I'd rather have Nate like this, a little

clingy and dramatic, than unhappy and withdrawn or on Lunaris. If his feeling the need for attention or affection was what was needed to keep him going, so be it.

Jane cleared her throat lightly. "We're going to start now."

Nate snapped back to attention, sitting up straight. I fixed my gaze forward as Jane stood from the log, brushing off her pants.

"Commander Rochwall has asked me to lead this session," she began, her voice carrying easily across the clearing. "For those of you who have been on this team for a while, you know this is a recurring thing. Every year we come back to basics."

She started pacing slowly in front of us.

"Your connection with your wolf is everything. Even if you choose not to shift, that bond needs to be strong. Especially for the Elite Team." She paused, looking at each of us, her gaze stuck on mine for a second longer. "Our wolf is our anchor. They sense danger before we do, give strength when ours runs out, and they keep you safe."

I thought about Lumia. About how far we had come since I first heard her voice a few years ago. We weren't perfect yet, we were getting there, but even so, she had always had my back. She was my anchor.

"This morning," Jane continued, "you'll spend time reconnecting with your inner selves. Your wolves. You will get to know each other all over again, talk out any misunderstandings, and discuss things you want to change." She smiled slightly. "And by the evening, if you're up for it, you can go for a run. But not too far."

A run?



I heard whispers around me. People already making plans, deciding who they would run with, which trails they would take.

It all sounded nice, but I didn't know if I wanted to go —

'We're going,' Lunia said flatly.

I let out a sigh. Of course, we were.

It was not up for debate.

"Around afternoon," Jane went on, "your two head commanders will show up with a special surprise."

Dylan mumbled under his breath. "Our Elite gear and our pins. It's the same as last year."

Kylan chuckled beside him. "Yeah, it's not that exciting."

I bobbed my head but didn't agree. Not exciting for them, maybe. They had been through this before, collected their pins, worn their uniforms. However, I couldn't wait. I had been anticipating the moment since they had fitted us for the uniforms the first week we returned. This would be my first time officially wearing the Elite uniform, and whether Commander Jorn believed I belonged here or not, no one could take that away from me.

"Alright," Jane said, clapping her hands once. A look of excitement crossed her face. "Pair up and face each other!"

People started moving immediately, shuffling around to find their partners. Nate and I met gazes across the grass. Without a word, I scooted forward until I was sitting in front of him.

Meanwhile, Kylan paired up with Dylan. They usually did during Elite



training because the two just worked so well together, like Nate and I did. No problem.

Nate's expression was way more serious now, showing this was not the time to joke around. He had always been quite focused in class.

"Will you be able to do it?" he asked, his eyes worried. "Talk to your wolf?"

A laugh slipped out. His mind must have still been on that tantrum I had thrown back in the Bloodrose swamps. It had been bad, sure, but the real threat right now was something else.

"I'll be able to do it," I said, confident. "The question is whether Lumia will let me talk to her. She can get...a bit cranky at times."

He raised a brow.

"She's stubborn," I added.

A huff sounded from within, and I waited for her response.

'I am not stubborn, Witchey,' she said. 'I acknowledge you, I respect you, but I am selective, and since there isn't much of use coming out of your mouth, I simply do not feel like talking to you sometimes...But I suppose we can...try?'

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